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THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

Testimony of

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Subcommittee on Defense**

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Chairman Murtha, Representative Young, distinguished members of the subcommittee, I welcome the opportunity to share with you how Navy Medicine is taking care of our nation's Sailors, Marines, and their families across the globe and at home.

As our nation continues to fight the Global War on Terror, Navy Medicine remains steadfast in its commitment to provide care on the battlefield and to continue to meet the other health care needs of our beneficiaries, active duty, reservists, military retirees, and family members. These efforts reflect our focus on the joint doctrine of Force Health Protection. The components of Force Health Protection include maintaining a healthy and fit force that is ready to deploy; deploying medical personnel to protect our warriors on the battlefield; restoring the health of those injured on the battlefield; providing care to our returning and retired warriors; and ensuring access to world-class health care for all beneficiaries.

Navy Medicine supports and protects our operational forces working in concert with the vision of the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant for the Navy-Marine Corps team.

Readiness is our most important priority. To be ready, Navy Medicine must be responsive, aligned and agile with the operational forces. We need to have the right people with the right capabilities ready to deploy in support of the Navy-Marine Corps mission.

Navy Medicine is continuously assessing its medical capabilities to improve and has adjusted to ensure the right health care capabilities are deployed as far forward as possible. These improvements are based on our experience and lessons learned, and on the requirements mandated by the warfighter. Changes have been made in the

training of the physicians, nurses and corpsmen who first encounter injured service members, as well as to the way certain types of injuries are treated.

Examples of our forward-deployed assets include Navy surgical capabilities located in Al Asad and Taqaddum. These units are the first oasis of care for many warfighters who are seriously wounded fighting insurgents. At Al Asad the majority of the injuries treated have been from improvised explosive devices. We provide patient resuscitation and stabilization for helicopter medical evacuations to higher-capability medical facilities, something no other medical unit in the surrounding area can offer.

Sailors at the medical unit in Taqaddum treat the most serious of patients from the entire area of operations, most arriving by helicopter directly from the battlefield. The platoon is staffed by dedicated and highly skilled uniformed medical personnel who stand in harm's way ready to fight for the lives of our wounded service members.

We are not content only maintaining the current excellence in combat service support and are constantly looking at the next steps in improving combat casualty care. Our current efforts center on expansion of our health surveillance, combat and operational stress control programs, and improving care for certain types of injuries such as traumatic brain injury. Combat casualty care is not limited to the care received while in theater, but extends to the information and training we provide to service members to prevent physical and mental health injuries before, during and after deployment.

Providing preventive and treatment services as early as possible is the best way to avoid or mitigate the long-term effects of war. Navy Medicine is committed to monitoring the health of deployed service members with the use of pre- and post-

deployment health assessments. These assessment tools are designed to identify potential issues of concern, both physical and mental. The program also provides service members information on how to access medical services for any physical or mental health issues that may occur after returning from deployment.

At Navy and Marine Corps bases across the country, Navy Medicine is coordinating with line commanders and their organic medical assets as we establish 13 Deployment Health Clinics to facilitate these health assessments. The goal for these clinics is to improve access to the continuum of care for post-deployment physical and mental health concerns. In addition, these clinics aim to minimize the stigma associated with getting care for deployment related health concerns, particularly issues related to mental health.

To specifically address combat stress, Navy Medicine launched the Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) pilot project in January 2004, which embedded psychiatrists and psychologists at regimental levels in ground Marine Corps units. The primary goal of this program—to effectively manage operational stress at the tactical level—is central to the readiness of the Marine Corps as a fighting force. To date there are three OSCAR teams, one associated with each of the three active USMC Divisions: 1st MARDIV located at Camp Pendleton, 2nd MARDIV located at Camp Lejeune, and 3rd MARDIV located at Camp Butler (Okinawa). The personnel for the OSCAR Teams are sourced from Navy medical treatment facilities or drawn from elsewhere within the Marine Corps structure.

Increased cooperation and collaboration with our federal health care partners is essential in providing the full range of quality health care. Navy Medicine's

strengthened partnership with Veterans Affairs medical facilities continues to grow and develop, extending our ability to care for our patients. This begins with the seamless transfer of care for injured service members to the VA and includes sharing resources to optimize our efforts and avoid duplication of services.

Navy Medicine's ability to provide expeditionary care for service members in theater under the severest of conditions is only rivaled by the high quality of care provided after they return home to heal from their injuries. As in the case of far forward care, Navy medical treatment facilities are continuously evolving to meet the needs of returning service members. Services have been tailored and expanded across the spectrum of health care.

One example of improvements being made to how and where care is being delivered is the establishment at Naval Medical Center San Diego of a major west coast facility to provide amputee care and other necessary services for combat veterans. As approximately 25 percent of all casualties call the west coast home, NMCS D created a Comprehensive Combat Casualty Care Center so these wounded warriors could receive the care they need close to their families. C5, as it is known, facilitates the crucial participation of families in the total healing process. This program provides both the wounded warrior and their family with access to essential support services. C5 provides an environment encompassing all treatment and services for injury recovery, emotional issues, physical rehabilitation, and tools for return to full duty or transition to civilian life.

Navy Medicine is also exploring new relationships such as these established with the Balboa Career Transition Center. NMCS D recently entered into an agreement with

the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the California Employment Development Department to provide quality VA benefit information and claims intake assistance, vocational rehabilitative services, career guidance, and employment assistance to wounded and injured service members and their families. This unique program will successfully coordinate all of the services available to these individuals.

In addition to the role Navy Medicine has played in Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom, there has been an increase in operational tempo of our medical personnel across the spectrum of Navy Medicine in recent years. These increases have been the result of new and expanded missions which include humanitarian efforts, missions in support of joint military operations, and a greater role in homeland security.

As demonstrated with the Pakistan earthquake and return visits to areas struck by the Indonesian tsunami, America's compassion and generosity are a powerful force of good will. These missions have transformed fear into trust and animosity into handshakes.

When Navy and Army medical personnel arrived in Pakistan in October 2005 after a devastating earthquake, U.S. forces brought medical capabilities including operating rooms, x-ray equipment, pharmacies, and laboratories to areas hit hardest by the disaster. During the lengthy deployment they treated over 20,000 patients. Navy and Marine Corps personnel set up a hospital at Shinkiari and Army medical personnel went to Muzaffarabad. They provided care to earthquake-stricken villagers and much needed support to an overburdened Pakistani medical system dealing with the impact of such a natural disaster.

The Navy and Marine Corps team also responded to another earthquake, this time in Indonesia in June 2006 where the medical team treated over 2,000 patients. The earthquake's destruction displaced hundreds of thousands of Indonesians. A mobile medical unit was set up at a local soccer field in Sewon and provided a variety of medical services including surgeries and vaccinations. The vaccination efforts focused on reducing the significant risk of contracting tetanus, a devastating bacterial infection that usually originates from a contaminated laceration.

USNS MERCY (T-AH 19), our hospital ship homeported in San Diego, completed a humanitarian assistance mission to Southeast Asia last year. MERCY provided direct aid to more than 87,000 people in Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines. MERCY's team included an unprecedented group of volunteers and professionals, civilians and military, men and women, dedicated to saving lives, restoring hope and spreading good will. The team included a dozen non-governmental organizations, US Army and US Air Force medical personnel, naval construction forces and medical personnel from Canada, India, Malaysia, Australia and Singapore.

MERCY's deployment was an exciting and important opportunity to bolster security, stability and prosperity—both at sea and ashore—in a region where we have important interests. MERCY's deployment was a model of cooperation and deliberate planning with Non-Governmental Organizations and partnering nations. This international collaboration underscores the Navy's commitment and tradition of providing medical and humanitarian assistance where and when needed and added a new dimension to forward presence.

The hospital ship's state of the art operating rooms, CT scan equipment, laboratories and her ability to electronically transfer medical information allowed the staff to consult with physicians in other locations. The international team performed over 1,000 surgeries and cared for over 60,000 patients. MERCY visited 10 locations in four countries and demonstrated the great capability and capacity the ship brings without requiring a significant presence ashore.

MERCY's crew played an important role as American goodwill ambassadors. Their actions demonstrated to thousands of people the true values and ideals we hold as Americans.

Also in 2006, Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) tasked the Navy with providing medical staffing in support of the Army's Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (LRMC) Germany. Upon arriving in November, this group of more than 300 Navy medical reservists and 30 active duty personnel became part of the LRMC team and are providing superior medical, surgical and preventive health care to wounded warfighters returning home. This mission demonstrates how our active duty and reserve components seamlessly integrate the talents and strengths of our reservists to accomplish the mission. This call to meet Landstuhl personnel needs also demonstrates the increased operational requirements and tempo to which Navy Medicine has been responding since the beginning of Operations Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The Expeditionary Medical Facility Kuwait (EMF-K) is in its third year as Navy Medicine detachments staff the U.S. Military Hospital in Kuwait and its nine outlying

clinics. This facility averages over 17,500 monthly patient encounters and is staffed by Navy personnel from 26 medical activities around the world.

U.S. Military Hospital Kuwait is a Level 3 medical facility that provides outpatient, as well as inpatient, care and specialty services such as cardiology, pulmonary, critical care, internal medicine, general surgery, optometry, orthopedics, gynecology, laboratory, pharmacy, radiology, mental health, dental and physical therapy. Sixty-five percent of troops who come to the facility are able to remain in theater. EMF-K also provides health care to Department of Defense personnel and Coalition forces stationed in the U.S. Army Forces Central Command area of responsibility—Kuwait, Qatar, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Joint initiatives are underway across the full spectrum of military medical operations around the world. Navy Medicine is committed to increasing the ways we jointly operate with the Army and Air Force. Ideally, all U.S. medical personnel on the battlefield—regardless of service affiliation – should have the same training, use the same information systems and operate the same equipment because we are all there for the same reason – to protect our fighting forces. It should not matter whether the casualty is a Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine, or Coast Guardsman, or what color uniform the medical provider wears. Injured warfighters should receive the same level of care delivered by personnel with the necessary training, equipment and information systems to maximize our efficiency and achieve the best patient outcomes.

Mr. Chairman, Navy Medicine has risen to the challenge of providing a comprehensive range of services to manage the physical and mental health challenges of our brave Sailors and Marines, and their families, who have given so much in the

service of our nation. We have opportunities for continued excellence and improvement, both in the business of preserving health and in the mission of supporting our deployed forces, while at the same time caring for beneficiaries throughout the United States.

I thank you for your tremendous support to Navy Medicine and look forward to our continued shared mission of providing the finest health services in the world to America's heroes and their families – those who currently serve, those who have served, and the family members who support them.